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THE SKYLINE

Assessing the highs and lows of Chicago architecture

By Blair Kamin

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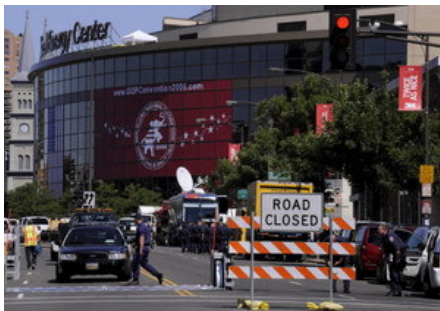
Originally posted: September 3, 2008

St. Paul style: An architectural primer for the Republican National Convention

Having devoted a post to Denver's lively architecture last week, I felt it was only fair to give the Republican convention city equal time, though St. Paul's design scene is considerably less interesting than its twin, Minneapolis, to the west.

The architectural critic Larry Millett's exhaustive and excellent "AIA Guide to the Twin Cities" captures St. Paul well: "Compared to its glitzy, skyscraper-laden competitor a few miles to the west, downtown St. Paul seems small and rather provincial.... Today, most of downtown St. Paul is a sleepy sort of place; only during the noon hour--when workers emerge from their cubicles and roam the skyways in search of food--does it have something like the pace and crackle of urban life."

But Millett also points out there is a lot worth seeing. "Despite its dowdy image," Millett continues, downtown St. Paul offers much of architectural interest, beginning with its extraordinary collection of major public buildings," including the iconic Minnesota State Capitol by architect Cass Gilbert (best known for New York City's great neo-Gothic Woolworth Building).



Millett has a mixed take on the convention's home, the Xcel Energy Center (left), by the HOK Sports Facilities Group (2000), home of the Minnesota Wild hockey team. "Although the arena's brick-and-glass exterior is as clunky as the rest of the complex," he writes, "inside you'll find of the nation's best venues for hockey." If nothing else, the hockey arena atmosphere should make Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, the self-proclaimed "hockey mom," feel right at home as she

addresses the convention tonight.

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